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CORN,
WITH A PROPOSITION
FOR THE
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OF THE
Prices
OF ALL
THE REQUISITES OF LIFE;
ADDRESSED TO
EVERY CLASS OF SOCIETY,
BY HOMO.

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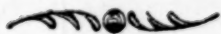
ADVERTISEMENT.

SINCE writing the following sheets, through the medium of a public newspaper, I have seen a letter addressed to Edward Topham, Esq.—I have read it with the utmost attention, and can but acknowledge it discovers great ingenuity in the writer, but to me his consequences are too remote to excite even that attention which otherwise his elegant epistle would justly claim.—Many of his remarks will be found to be superseded in this Tract—his comparative estimate on the article of Clothing (although alluded to in this treatise in general terms, under the head *Forestalling, &c.*) must appear far too light in the scale against the *Poor Man*, who pines for want—his observation on the *Precious Metals*, to me, is equally futile; in the flourish of rhetorick it may appear important, and, perhaps, the writer may be one of those, who, from a great influx of that precious article, (by what means is immaterial) may truly say, that with him gold has greatly depreciated; but give me leave to tell him, he is not the criterion for me to judge by. How stands the case with thousands, and tens of thousands, whose earnings have been from one to two shillings per day for many years back, and are now no more? Are not these facts too striking for a wise people to be illuded by theoretical finesse?

INTRODUCTION.

THIS Treatise was begun in the close of the year 1799, when Corn was rapidly on the advance; but sensible of the magnitude of its object, and diffident of my own abilities, I deferred the arrangement of my sentiments from time to time, in hopes that at least another harvest would do away the necessity of their publication; but experience has painfully proved, that, even at that period, they would have been well-timed, if well-received. It is evidently not yet too late to produce their governing object—a Public Good. On behalf of the Work I have only to say, it contains the plain sentiments of a plain man, whose education will not entitle him to be ranked with the learned.—That there may be errors in the composition is very probable; but I trust there is a class of no small number who will generously waive that nicety of language (which invariably marks the scholar) and regard, with respect, its real worth. Of the few who may read only to criticise, I am sensible I must submit to the stroke; but to beat an unarmed man is no great conquest.

CONSIDERATIONS.



SEEING all men will readily allow, that the article of CORN is one among the requisites of life, the most indispensable to the people of this land—it naturally follows, when any thing arises to deprive them, in a greater or less degree, of their usual and due proportion, that the attention of the far greater part of the community must be seriously awakened. At a time like this, it becomes the bounden duty of every man liberally to contribute, to the utmost of his ability, in whatever way it may present itself, for the pacification and relief of his fellow members of society. Under this impression, I am induced to offer the following remarks to the public—and trust, that, however inadequate to the purposes proposed they may be, if they happily excite in others the means of obtaining so desirable an end, I shall be amply rewarded for having thus exposed myself to their view.

That Corn has been, and now is, at such a price, as to place a due proportion of it far out of the reach of many thousands of the community of this land, will not be denied. To consider the circumstances that may probably appear to have led to it, will, of course, be my first object.

I shall not hesitate to say, I believe it had its origin in a known real deficiency in the produce of the year 1799; which, undoubtedly, has been increased to a price, considerably above what any circumstance would warrant, in the present state of the income of the labouring part of society, by competition and a thirst for gain; which, it can but be acknowledged, the general, but unfounded plea of scarcity, has tended too much to conceal; and, when more fully disclosed, cannot possibly fail to excite a judicious people to devise such means, and, through the medium of Parliament, wisely enact such laws, as shall effectually put a stop to so great an evil. I would not have it inferred from this, that, had the admitted deficiency amounted to real scarcity, the people ought to be compelled to procure themselves bread, upon any terms the growers, or holders of corn, might be disposed to part with it; far otherwise. It must be confessed, by every intelligent man, that the produce of the earth, in the
absolute

absolute necessities of life, can but be a qualified property; and the holders thereof amenable to such laws, as the Government, under which they live, may see meet to impose, for the public good;—for what is gold, when nature craves for food?

I do not apprehend it needful, in the present view of the subject, to say more on our being really in such a state of famine, as to be in want of bread, than, the seriousness of such a state would sufficiently demonstrate—that no pecuniary, or other recompence, beyond the ability of the people, ought to be exacted, to allay their hunger; for it is indubitably the first duty of Government to feed its subjects. And I am firmly persuaded, that if, in wisdom, such a dispensation should be allotted us, nothing would tend so much to alleviate the affliction, and shorten the calamity, as an equitable distribution of the necessities of life.

Having said so much, I shall proceed to treat, in this place, a little on the commercial part of the subject, in order to discover how far the trade may have increased our difficulties, with respect to the price of provisions.

In a country, where the population exceeds, by much, the given quantity of land supposed to be necessary for the subsistence of such a body—it has been long since rendered intelligent, to men of common capacity, that manufacture and trade, in all its various branches, is the most laudable, and, under proper controul, the most equitable mode of subsistence, that has yet been discovered by civilized people. Hence it naturally follows—that all classes of society ought to be secure in the free and undisturbed privilege of exercising their several vocations; but it should be remembered, that it does not, in any degree, diminish the greatness of this franchise—that, in all cases, private interest should be sacrificed to public good; with this proviso—that the public should, in all cases, where no law has been transgressed, make ample recompence to such individuals, whose property is so sacrificed.

The corn trade has, of late, become a very extensive one—more particularly so, perhaps, because of the spirit of the times. I confine myself solely to our commercial concerns.

This is a day, in which many thousands, from various circumstances, not at all necessary for
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me to hint at, are at their wits end, to devise such justifiable means of preserving a fair equilibrium in trading affairs; that many, continually harrassed with the apprehension of being overpoised, have boldly engaged in the line of speculation, to save their leaky vessel, and preserve her cargo. And how has this kind of traffic raised even little men, and, no doubt, many very deservedly, into great power and consequence; and yet, to the production of the evil, we now complain of; for they have carried with them, into another sphere of life, and communicated that art of money-getting, to a class of society, who, in the history of the last age, would have almost thought it beneath them to have been concerned in—but who, from a turn in the tide of popular opinion, notwithstanding their elevated and opulent station of life, have, with avidity, embarked in the scheme, and become the great merchants, in that very line of trade, the country seems now resolutely fixed on totally suppressing, *i. e.* forestalling, &c.

I hope I shall not be thought to write, or think disrespectfully, of any character, that may be alluded to, in general terms, in this tract. I have not the shadow of an intention of any thing of the kind;—I am only desirous that the subject
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may be clearly opened, and generally understood; and that the system, and not individuals, may become the object of our investigation;—and, in the search, I am induced to believe, we shall find this is not the root of that evil, we are so anxiously engaged to remedy;—it will be found to be a natural branch of trade, raised and cultivated by that highly reputable commercial body, the major part of the whole nation; and which, if attempted to be amputated, will effectually strike at the very life of the body. For of what denomination are multitudes of those transactions, done on the Exchange? How many millions sterling are annually bought there, that custom has rendered almost among the necessities of life, by a few individuals, comparatively speaking, who, but for the immediate succession of sales, and foreign arrivals, would have the command of the whole market; add to this, the various transactions, to an immense amount, independent of what is called the regular trade in all London, Manchester, and most other manufacturing and port towns; is it all any thing short of forestalling? And yet this very branch of trade is, without doubt, the only means of subsistence of many thousands in this nation—and a very important addition to the income of many thousands more, who are not so immediately

diately dependent thereon;—and, finally, may be said to be the only source, from which we have gained such strength, to cope with the extraordinary pressure of the times; and for which we are only indebted to the improved and liberal manner in which we are educated in the knowledge of men and things.

Perhaps it may be thought by some, that I am travelling a little too far from my subject; but, it does not appear foreign to the purpose—because I am quite of opinion, that what may be termed forestalling, &c. is a matter that, if opposed in the way in which it has been started, will lead into a vast deal of litigation and animosity; and, in the end, will never produce the object we are looking for—a reduction in the price of provisions.

I would not have it supposed, from these remarks, that I censure those measures against forestalling, which have been adopted, with great propriety, by disinterested and dispassionate men, no doubt, as the only alternative, under the existing circumstances; and a clear discovery it is, that something is wanted to be done in the matter. But after all that can be done against forestalling—what effect will that have upon monopolists? Have they not all the power of the
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forestaller, &c.? And who have it more in their power to produce the effect of both, and transgress no civil law, than the occupiers of land? Are they all, of necessity, compelled to sell, to pay their rent—to pay their taxes—or to maintain their families? Will not a small sum, above the capital employed, by each individual, in stocking their farms, enable half the farmers to retain their corn from market the whole year; or, at least, to obtain whatever price they choose? This must evidently be within the reach of many. And may we not, without breach of charity, (for all men love themselves) greatly apprehend, that such would, in a very great degree, be our deplorable situation, did not the verdant fields proclaim succeeding harvest?

Now seeing, that all this is very possible, and, at this time, so far probable, that no moderate price will bring samples to market, although much of the new corn is harvested, stacked, and thatched for store; and, no doubt, much of the last year's wheat remains yet unsold; does it not clearly prove, that nothing short of a limited, and an enacted price, to the article of corn, will, in any degree, ensure to the people, such a supply of the necessaries of life, as Providence is pleased to bless them with, upon such terms, as
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they have an undoubted right to claim them. —I am well aware, I shall have many, and potent combatants, on this subject; but hear me patiently, and I will endeavour to prove it the highest interest of all classes of society, both individually and collectively, that such a law should pass. The nation appears to be unanimously of the mind, that, so exceedingly deranged is the system, by which our domestic œconomy is regulated, that something important and decisive is called for, at their hands. Many are of opinion, that the measures, which have been too successfully used, to increase the magnitude of farms, have been the one great cause. Suppose it has;—what laws would you make, to lessen them, to the effectual relief of the present case? Would you abrogate leases? Would you compel land-owners to build houses, barns, &c. for the necessary division of the lands?—I think, without going further, I may venture to say—that, much to be desired, as it really is, we can hold such a matter only as a consequence, that would flow in due course, from the law in question; which cannot possibly fail to afford general satisfaction; being greatly to the advantage of the landed interest—and without the interference of, and consequent trouble and perplexity, to the

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Legislature;—for there cannot be much difficulty in framing a bill, for the limitation of the price of corn. And of how much importance it is, to the nation at large, in its national capacity, in the scale of the commercial world, will, I think, be readily seen, by all who are willing to judge dispassionately; when we consider, that the whole manufacture of the kingdom, in relation to the prosperity of a foreign trade, must depend entirely on its value with us—which is principally regulated by the price of bread.

Has not every aspiring genius in the art of manufacture (and who, no doubt, as far as he has contributed to industry, and national prosperity, deserves well of his country) wisely sought the kingdom, for that spot, where food and raiment, and, consequently, labour, were cheap? Grant this, and it immediately follows, to be of no small moment to the export of our manufacture, that the nominal value of land should not exceed the average of its reputed worth, for the last twenty years. I state the last twenty years, because, perhaps, it will be admitted, that, within that period of time, the manufactures of this country have had the preference, to those of other nations, in most, if not all, the markets of the known world. And, I am ready to believe, that

that other nations are not in the way, at present, of obtaining that ascendancy over us, as to render it necessary to descend below that average;—in which case, the land-owner has an undoubted right to expect such portion of the produce of his estate, upon such terms, as the income of persons, so situated, is supposed to be equivalent; whereby it would become a considerable annual advantage to proprietors of land. For I would just wish to ask, if it is not a certain fact—that the annual expenditure for housekeeping and travelling expences, has increased to a sum, far above any equivalent, in the additional rent that has been laid on farms, for the last fourteen years past. And, I am further of opinion, were a scrutiny to take place, it would be found to have pressed heaviest on men of the largest estate—whose nobility and generosity have been such, as to induce them to retain their tenantry, at old, and comparatively trivial rents;—and what must it be, where large estates are entailed, under long leases? The man of real property, under such circumstances, does not stand a fair and equitable chance.

Surely, the consideration of these things, will not, in the smallest degree, induce the proprietors of land to oppose the passing of a Law, to limit

the price of corn.—By this, it may be thought, I am regardless of the consequences that may result to the Farmer; but that is not the case. I have constantly had in view, both the benefit of themselves, and their posterity, who may be educated for agriculturalists.

Is it to be supposed, that the continuation of the present high price of corn, will in no wise affect your expiring leases? There is little doubt but it would—and that materially. At what period was it ever more difficult for farmers to place their sons on eligible estates, and why? Because the advantages that have been derived by persons of property, who could retain their crops, and command their market, has been sufficient fully to enable them to keep their stewards, or trusty servants, at even a high rate, to supply them with that knowledge, themselves had never laboured for; and, although sufficient for their purpose, I am jealous, has not been sufficient, to extract what the land would really produce, under the culture of its practical professors. And to this may, in some degree, be attributed, the great deficiency in our annual produce: for, the method of farming seems, of late, to be greatly transposed. And, there is very little doubt with me—that if the cry of the poor, for bread,

bread, had not touched the feelings of the public, and things had gone on in this way—in a very few years more, it would be thought as great an acquisition to rent a farm, almost on any terms, as it is now to purchase one.

And, I hope, there are none among you all, so far lost to the tenderest ties of nature, to have no further consideration for your posterity, than to train them up in your service, in all the requisite qualifications and accomplishments of a respectable farmer—and, when you have so done, suffer your own avarice to deprive them of their birthright—and leave them no other inheritance, than a joint benefit with their widow'd mother—whom her generous landlord, in consideration of her numerous family, permits to stay on the farm. For after all, it would be thought a pretty thing, if you leave your children four or five hundred pounds each—and your farm, well stocked, for the benefit of your widow. But remember, even this will be of little value, if they have it not in their power to occupy therewith; that I think, of all men, you have the least cause to object,

But you will say,—why should we, more than any other class of society, be debarred the
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chances of a free trade, in the very articles that our own ingenuity and labour have produced? The country can but be greatly indebted to us;—and who would farm for others, if they were not allowed a fair compensation, for their trouble? Granted—you are entitled to a rich reward—and no body wants to deprive you of it: but, call to mind, that the Legislature has ever considered agriculturalists as a distinct body of society; totally unconnected with the mercantile interest; insomuch, that you are excluded the benefit of the Bankrupt Laws; and, perhaps, from this circumstance:—that scarcely any thing, but your own imprudence, in the management of your domestic affairs, was likely to subject you to an event, that solicits their clemency; for your department is, evidently, to manure and till the ground. And it can scarcely be supposed, there ever was a time, when you were not amply paid, for all your labour, according to your various situations in life. And if, by reason of the blessings of plenty, at any one time, you have appeared to have but little coming in, in proportion to your toil—your outgoings must have been equally small; that, of all classes, you have the least to fear—and, under your several tenures, may be strictly said to enjoy the most independent

dent and perfect state of freedom, that is known among us.

But you will say—Are we to be allowed nothing extra, for the badness of a season? Yes; what will you have? Is *double* sufficient? Modesty will not give you leave, under any circumstances, to ask more; because, if it is ever so bad a season, the people are forced to eat its produce; and you never have less than half a crop; and you, surely, will not flinch from a small share in the affliction of the nation.

Then, suppose we say, that wheat shall never exceed Four Guineas a quarter, or eight Winchester bushels, (for wheat has been currently sold at half that price, within these two years), and all other grain in like proportion: and whoever is detected in exacting more, in any way whatever, on the evidence of the person who bought it, made out to the satisfaction of a jury—he should forfeit all his corn, so sold, and be liable to all costs of suit—one half to the person who gave the information, and the other half to the poor of the parish where the person, who bought it, resides; to be obtained by distraint, in case of refusal of payment, on conviction. And this, I think, I can clearly prove to be the greatest interest

terest of the proprietor, the farmer, the merchant, the miller, the baker, and the people at large.

As I have before stated, that, circumstanced as many of the land owners must be, the annual produce of whose estates has been long since regulated, and yet remain to be restricted, for years to come, by lease—they can but with justice be urgent for this regulation. And, of the rest, I am fully satisfied, that if such a law does not pass, no reasonable addition of rent, on grant of lease, will be equivalent to the increasing expence of their domestic concerns. It does not follow, that, because of this position, they may not have an income of ten times as much as their annual expenditure. And, on behalf of the tenant, in cases of deficiency in the produce of the season, the increase of the price will invariably flow into his coffer; as it will not be to the interest of the merchant to buy on speculation, at much above the general price—by which, it will remain in his possession, till it reaches its stipulation; when, having no interest to retain it longer, he will cheerfully forward it to market, and be upon a par with all his neighbours. Add to this—he is divested of all those frightful apprehensions, of having his farm purchased over his head, by some speculative character

racter—who, otherwise, might turn him adrift, at the expiration of his lease.—No trifling consideration to a man, with a wife, and a large family.—Are not these things sufficient, to make you warm advocates for such a law?

The regular corn merchant (for I am speaking to those in regular trade) will have nothing to apprehend, from those flocks of speculators and commission-men, that, under the late circumstances, have rushed into all the corn-markets in the kingdom, and, I am sorry to say, have preyed upon the vitals of the people. But I have no wish to say any thing, that may excite animosity against this class of society—for they have transgressed no civil law—and, consequently, are free from any imputation of crime; and have only acted that part, that but very few of us, in their situation, would not have done; and which we are now called upon, by wholesome laws, to restrain us all from doing.

The millers and mealmen, in all cases, when the market is not amply supplied by the growers, will always have recourse to the merchant, who, from the restriction, will be willing to sell for a fair profit: and thus, they need never stay for work, when wind and water bid them move. And, by this means, the trade will be better done,

and better worth doing, by all who wish to pursue it, as a regular trade. There will be plenty of room for a reasonable and fair speculation—such a one, as, I trust, will not hurt the people. For, by corn being more dispersed, it will not be injured in the way, there is great reason to fear, it has, by heaping.

The bakers, amongst the rest, will be no losers by the alteration—for they will then be allowed their profit, in proportion to the price of wheat, as they are now. To this you may add, the benefit arising from the reduction of the capital, necessary to carry on the same extent of trade—by which they have an opportunity of going to market on better terms.

And, finally, the people at large can but rejoice at such a prospect. A few may, perhaps, apprehend, that if once that price is fixed, we shall never have it lower. This is a wrong notion; for it is not consistent with the interest of persons concerned. The corn of the country is subject to a gradual consumption; and, while it remains under its maximum price, the people will not be over anxious to buy more than they want, for temporary use; consequently, if the farmer will sell, he must sell to merchants, who will not buy, without the prospect of securing a profit;—

profit;—and, in that, he must be always guided by the produce of the season; for the farmer will always have an effectual check upon the merchant: so that when there is a plenty, there is no doubt, but that the reciprocal influence of farmer and merchant, will secure to the public an ample supply, upon such terms, as, in justice, we may all call moderate. For, is it not, at this time, a melancholy truth, that, according to the forced confession of the growers (with a small exception, on particular lands) there never was a greater quantity of corn grown? yet wheat is now selling in Norfolk, from the flail, at six guineas a quarter and upwards; and, scarcely a month back, in the time of supposed scarcity, it would obtain but little more than half the money. Have the late bountiful rains reduced the quantity? It must be known, that they have increased it. And if the corn was abundantly worse than it really is, we must eat it. The practice of the last season sufficiently evinces that. Then—why does the farmer complain of a showery harvest, because an evil eye discovers to him, that his neighbour has been a better husbandman than him, and housed his corn in finer order?

There is no reason to fear, but such a price, as has been before stated, will be a sufficient emo-

lument, strongly to induce the growers to cultivate a due and necessary proportion of wheat; and we need not to encourage them to grow too much—for experience has taught us, that by it many, still as important, branches of agriculture, are neglected; for instance, the very great reduction in our dairy farms.

Is it not the painful language of the poor—that it is hard living upon bread alone? And how many of them, do you think, through the exorbitant price of that article, have been compelled to it, and not had enough neither?—and who, to the very great injury of the nation, have actually consumed more than they otherwise would have done, could they have procured any other kind of food. Turn back, and take a view of a farm-house, only two seven years ago! Where would you go, for a more perfect pattern of English hospitality? The poor were not sent empty away. But is it so now? Can they get a drop of milk, for money, at many farm-houses? Does not this amount to a crying evil—to deprive the suckling offspring of the only aliment nature has prescribed? For the parent, who can hardly procure food to sustain her own frame, cannot possibly yield that supply, that nature would otherwise furnish.

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Does not this call loudly for help, and will it not be effectually relieved by the plan suggested. Look into the rates for the maintenance of the poor, have they not been swelled beyond precedent, and look for whom—for middle aged, and even young grown up people, healthy, strong, and able to work, and who, a few years back, would have been committed to bridewell, if they would not work for their living, and all this has evidently been produced by the high price of provisions, and that not of necessity; but, what shall I say? to satiate the avarice of comparatively a few individuals. I wish not to be severe, but it is necessary to speak plain, in order that the evil may be redressed; for I am fully persuaded, the way we have been in is not the way to raise the interest and prosperity of the nation. A few years back, we seemed, of one accord, to engage in a very laudable undertaking, no doubt, with a view, to private good and public advantage, I mean the education of the offspring of the poor; but how is the nobleness of this institution eclipsed by the present state of things alluded to; for if by none of the common employments of the labouring class of society they are enabled to procure the necessaries of life, we are only teaching them more poignantly to feel their calamitous situation.

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Perhaps you will readily admit, that all this is very true, as far it goes; but what should be done, where the produce of the season is short of the usual consumption of the country? Whenever the price of wheat is four guineas per quarter in every county market town in the kingdom, an enquiry should be immediately made by Government, in order, as near as may be, to ascertain the stock on hand; in which case, a bounty on the importation of foreign corn might be sufficient to meet the exigency of the public; should more vigilant measures be necessary, I trust, it is hardly needful for me to say the importance of such a matter, in the hour of its appearance, would sufficiently evince the expediency of a general and weighty counsel on the subject. And can any thing be a stronger proof of the falsity of such allegations, seeing no such measures appear to have been a public consideration. And nothing more has been really done in this late dreaded year of famine, than might have been equally as well done under all the laws prescribed in this tract, and how much more to the peace and satisfaction of the nation, I leave you to judge.

With respect to what has been hinted at in the public papers, on the subject of Government buying up the corn for store against a
time

time of scarcity, whenever it should be below a certain price; I cannot help thinking that such a step is not at all needful, on the ground of encouragement to agriculturalists; and on the point of providing against ills that may never befall us, it strikes me as an offence to Christianity, as well as a degradation to our national character of being a generous people, for we have been long so esteemed, and do not let us now become misers, and hoard up that we cannot eat. If Providence is pleased again to bless us with abundance, let us do unto all as we would be done unto. Let us export it to our neighbours, and encourage our labourers, and in the time of need we shall have a well-grounded hope to believe, gratitude will induce them to supply our wants, which all the policy of human invention will not do, if such is our allotted dispensation.

Should it be thought that I have not been sufficiently explanatory on the subject of provisions in general, I may just observe, I apprehend the much wished for regulation the inevitable consequence of the proposed law.

Having now, in a few words, set forth such measures as have, and do still appear to me of absolute necessity to be adopted for the good
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and safety of the nation, I am constrained, for the welfare of my fellow members of society of all classes, to submit them, for their candid and impartial consideration, and I trust, that at least, were they disposed to try the expedient, by immediately, on the meeting of Parliament, petitioning for such a law, it could not fail to produce advantages, far more important than any measures that have been hitherto adopted for that purpose.

And with the most upright and honest wishes for its success,

I am, very respectfully,

HOMO.

HARVEST 1800.

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